

SOMERSET COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
ANNUAL REPORT SUMMARY &
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT & IMPROVEMENT PLAN
-2006-

Purpose & Authority

This Assessment and Improvement Plan has been developed to address environmental issues and describe the activities and goals within the Somerset County Department of Health. The Plan will outline proposed services that will improve our efforts to increase the environmental quality of the County of Somerset.

The Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders created the Somerset County Department of Health (SCDH), pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 26:3A2-1 et seq.*, to provide limited environmental health services throughout the County. Focus areas include solid waste compliance monitoring, air quality, water quality, and community noise enforcement. Since 1992, SCDH has conducted compliance and enforcement activities as a New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) certified agency, under the County Environmental Health Act (CEHA). This gives the SCDH authority to enforce applicable environmental State Statutes and Administrative Codes. The Department and its certified subcontracting agencies investigate citizen complaints, perform routine NJDEP delegated inspections and provide public information and education services in matters concerning environmental health. SCDH gathers evidence of violations as required and pursues enforcement when indicated. SCDH is authorized to issue civil administrative penalties and convene settlement negotiations with violators of NJDEP regulations.

The Somerset County Department of Health also serves as the local health department for the Borough of North Plainfield, while public health issues within the other 20 municipalities of the County are addressed by 9 other distinct local health agencies. SCDH serves as the central agency for the County's Local Information Network Communications System (LINCS), the Bioterrorism Grant Preparedness Project, and has established a Governmental Public Health Partnership (GPHP) to support and guide the development of environmental and public health services within the County.

Community Background

Somerset County, located in the heart of central New Jersey, occupies an area of 305 square miles with a diverse mix of suburban, urban and rural communities. The 2000 Census population was 297,490, with a population density of 976 persons per square mile. The population increased dramatically – 23.8% - over 1990 levels, compared with 8.6% growth throughout the State. Over ¼ of the County population is below 18 years of age. Smart growth and preserving open space are important issues to County residents. Somerset County residents enjoy a relatively low rate of poverty and relatively high rate of homeownership. The 2002 median household income was \$88,957 and the 2003 median home sales price was \$389,945.

Personnel and Equipment

The Somerset County Department of Health maintains a full-time staff of 14 professionals consisting of a Director of Health, Epidemiologist, Health Educator, CEHA Program Manager, 3 CEHA Principal Inspectors, a Registered Environmental Health Specialist, a Public Health Nurse Director, an Information Technologist, GPHP Coordinator, LINCIS Coordinator, Office Manager and an Administrative Assistant. Field staff utilize equipment that includes four trucks, five GPS units (three hand held units and two back pack units), GIS supporting software and plotter, laptop computers, digital cameras, Nextel radio/telephones, weather monitoring equipment for air inspections, one gas leak detector and two certified noise meters.

Environmental Issues and Program Goals

Clean Air

The Somerset County Department of Health is committed to reducing incidences of air pollution in Somerset County. Our goal is to ensure that air throughout the County is healthful to breathe and that air pollutants will not damage our forests, land and water bodies. Somerset County does not currently have an NJDEP air monitoring station within its borders; therefore specific data for air quality trends is not readily available. However, sampling stations in Hunterdon, Morris and Middlesex, surrounding Somerset borders, showed 8 days in 2004 where ozone exceeded health limits. Ground level ozone is formed as a by-product of volatile organic chemicals and nitrous oxides emitted from motor vehicle exhaust, industrial facilities and gasoline vapors. Ozone is implicated in health issues such as asthma and increased susceptibility to respiratory illnesses, to environmental damage including reduced crop yields and tree leaf damage. SCDH works closely with NJDEP initiatives to reduce ozone-forming emissions wherever possible.

Through September of 2005, inspectors conducted 71 routine NJDEP delegated inspections of minor source permitted facilities, including those containing regulated boilers, emergency generators, and dry cleaning operations. Additionally, SCDH began detailed inspections of mobile equipment coating operations in 2005. SCDH responded to 28 NJDEP referrals and 14 citizen complaints involving air quality issues. The majority of these investigations were related to odor complaints. A total of 19 enforcement actions were initiated, with \$5,800 in penalties assessed. The air program is an important and substantial portion of our CEHA delegated inspections, representing approximately 30% of staff activities.

Activities for 2006 will include routine compliance inspections of permitted facilities and enforcement where indicated. SCDH will promptly respond to NJDEP referrals and citizen complaints of odors, open burning, truck idling and other sources of particulate emissions. Routine idling enforcement in problem areas will be continued as staff availability allows. Staff will maintain certifications in Visual Emissions and Odor Enforcement.

Clean Water

Somerset County residents are concerned about having sufficient quantities of clean ground and surface water for consumption and recreational purposes. Drinking water sources are varied throughout the County, with urban and suburban communities utilizing public water supplies and the vast majority of rural communities relying on private well water. The Somerset County Department of Health plays an active role in the oversight and regulation of public non-community (PNC) water sources. Any drinking water well which has the potential to serve 25 or more persons, for at least 60 days, in a given calendar year falls under the scope of SCDH's jurisdiction and these systems are required to perform various levels of water quality analyses each year to ensure a safe and potable drinking water supply.

In 2005, 39 routine PNC inspections were conducted through September 30th. The vast majority of facilities were found to be in compliance with Safe Drinking Water Act regulations. In most cases, quarterly and annual testing results are satisfactory and communicated to NJDEP in a timely fashion. There have been 11 Notices of Violation and \$10,250 in penalties assessed to date. Beyond routine inspections, a large focus for our water program in 2006 will be continuing education of the regulated community on proper maintenance and upkeep of their water treatment and distribution systems. In 2005, SCDH developed a mandatory, standard application/approval form for PNC systems requiring physical alterations and/or wishing to install water treatment devices. Finally, a small portion of Somerset County is located within the Preservation Area of the Highlands Region. SCDH will also be responsible for the review and approval of any PNC installations or system modifications within this Area.

The regulation of private wells throughout the County falls under local health department authority. Installation and testing requirements of residential wells vary by municipality. Additionally, smaller public facilities that do not meet the PNC classification are outside the jurisdiction of SCDH, and gaps exist in our knowledge of the water quality at these facilities. Local health departments also oversee the water quality of all recreational bathing facilities in the County, under NJDHSS authority and regulations.

SCDH serves as an intermediary for results obtained through the Private Well Testing Act. Water quality information from residential real estate transactions is reviewed by SCDH, adding to our knowledge of Countywide trends, and then transmitted to the local health department authority. The local health officer has the final say in any decision to provide public notification of contamination, or to recommend testing of surrounding residences. Over 150 PWTA analyses have been reviewed to date in 2005. Through CEHA funding, the SCDH has offered, and will continue to offer as available, limited reimbursement for municipal groundwater testing to support these health departments. From September 2002 through March 2003, State summary data showed fecal coliform bacteria and arsenic to be the greatest contaminants of concern in the County. Out of 313 wells sampled, 21 showed bacterial contamination and 18 had levels of arsenic above guidelines. Bacterial contamination of a well can be the result of nearby septic system malfunction and/or physical deterioration of the system itself. Arsenic is a naturally occurring compound in abundance in some areas of Somerset County. In 2005,

SCDH continued to monitor these trends, plotted points of contamination through GIS mapping and shared this information with local counterparts. In addition, SCDH is beginning a project to spatially relate contamination with volatile organic chemicals (VOCs) to known NJDEP regulated facilities within the County.

Surface water quality is also an important issue in Somerset County, with EPA data showing a significant portion of surface water bodies having some form of impaired quality. SCDH is committed to ensuring that rivers, lakes and streams will be fishable, swim-able and support healthy ecosystems. In 2005, SCDH began a new project to assist NJDEP in ambient surface water monitoring. We will increase our training whenever possible to become prepared to intercede in areas of potential surface water contamination. SCDH will also work with our County Engineering Department to analyze information collected from NJDEP's stormwater regulations. By analyzing water discharged into streams and rivers from regulated outfalls, we will decrease the amount of illicit connections and potential pollution in County waterways. While the CEHA water program has traditionally represented approximately 25% of SCDH environmental activity, this area is expected to increase substantially in coming years under new direction from NJDEP and increased training for field staff.

Solid Waste Inspections/Enforcement

The Somerset County Department of Health is committed to ensuring an environment free from litter, illegal dumping and unsafe solid waste transportation and disposal facilities. The solid waste program is therefore an important and significant part of our delegated CEHA activities. Approximately 40% of CEHA activity is dedicated to solid waste compliance and enforcement. Through 09/30/05, field staff conducted 30 routine facility inspections and initiated 211 field investigations, resulting in 191 solid waste enforcement actions, with \$153,000 in penalties assessed year-to-date.

In 2006, SCDH will continue to perform routine compliance inspections of solid waste facilities within the County, including one privately owned transfer station and intermodal facility, recycling centers, citizen drop-off sites, farmland mulch sites and compost facilities. SCDH will continue to seek NJDEP training and guidance in technical aspects of facility inspections. Additionally, improperly maintained waste collection equipment, illegally run collection operations and violators of waste disposal regulations will be penalized as necessary. SCDH will continue to play an active role in abating areas of improperly disposed or stockpiled tires, which serve as mosquito breeding habitats.

Finally, field staff will continue to perform inspections to determine recycling compliance at schools, multi-unit housing facilities, convenience stores and office complexes. Results are communicated to our County Recycling Coordinator for outreach and education, and enforcement is initiated as needed. 8 Notices of Violation were issued through September of 2005 to establishments that were found to be non-compliant with the County's mandate for source-separation of all recyclable wastes.

A Noise Free Environment

Somerset County residents are concerned about excessive noise that degrades their quality of life. Accordingly, SCDH is committed to respond to their concerns by appropriate investigation and enforcement of violators of the State Noise Code (N.J.A.C. 7:29). SCDH employs three professionals certified in Community Noise Enforcement, and maintains two regularly calibrated noise meters to investigate noise complaints. These complaints typically arise in areas where manufacturing and industrial facilities are in close proximity to residential zones. While the number of noise complaints remains low, each incident has significant impact upon the citizens subjected to it. Accordingly, SCDH will react aggressively to ensure the elimination of unwanted and irritating noise, maintaining the quality of life that Somerset County residents deserve.

In 2005, approximately 5% of CEHA activities were related to noise complaints. A total of 10 investigations were conducted, as of 9/30/05, with 2 enforcement actions initiated. It is important to note that many other instances of noise violations are handled each year at the local health department level within this County, as many townships have sought to adopt the Model Noise Code and pursue enforcement with local police officers and health department personnel. SCDH will remain an active partner in ensuring that ongoing training and resources are available to these departments.

Safe & Healthy Communities/Hazardous Materials Team Preparedness

Somerset County residents must be protected from health and ecological risks from hazardous substances. The safe use, transport and disposal of hazardous materials is overseen by the Somerset County Office of Emergency Management. OEM staff are trained and prepared in HazMat investigations, and a portion of CEHA grant monies are utilized for the equipment and training needs of OEM personnel. Additionally, OEM has received a large influx of funding from other governmental preparedness programs since 9/11/01. First responders at all levels are receiving comprehensive training in bioterrorism, as well as nuclear and chemical threats.

Other Environmental Issues

It should be noted that there are many other vital environmental issues affecting Somerset County residents not specifically outlined here. The joint efforts of SCDH and local municipal and health department counterparts are crucial in addressing resident's concerns about indoor air quality, underground storage tanks, septic systems, radon, pesticides, occupational health and a multitude of other environmental concerns. Regulation and education in these areas are accomplished through local, County and State professionals. It is necessary to increase the dialogue between agencies about emerging environmental issues of concern to Somerset County residents. The collaborative efforts of the Somerset County Health Officers Association and the Governmental Public Health Partnership will expand our knowledge and allow a forum for focused, Countywide action to address environmental issues.

Open and Effective Government

The Somerset County Department of Health will continue to encourage and develop strategic partnerships with other local, state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, environmental commissions, the general public and the business community to address environmental issues and concerns. We will respond promptly to complaints and health information requests from the public. The CEHA program will seek more dialogue with local health departments on environmental issues and foster cooperation regarding identification and referrals of new, potential SCDH regulated operations.